
The second Paper read was—

2. *British Columbia. Journeys in the Districts bordering on the Fraser, Thompson, and Harrison Rivers.* By Lieuts. MAYNE, R.N., and PALMER, R.E., and Chief-Justice M. BEGGIE.

Communicated by the DUKE of NEWCASTLE, Colonial Office.

THE above communications are written at considerable length, and are so largely occupied with the description of numerous but essential details, that it is impossible to do justice to them in so short an abstract as the following, especially without the assistance of a map.

Lieutenant Palmer was ordered by Colonel Moody to make an engineering reconnaissance of the neighbourhood of Fraser River. He reports minutely on the steps that should be taken at each point of his route in order to make a good communication for cart or boat traffic. He has fixed the geographical positions of numerous places, and he gives a detailed account of all the patches of land available for cultivation which fell under his notice. His report is accompanied by six explanatory plans and three photographic views.

Lieutenant Mayne was detached from H.M.S. *Plumper* by order of Captain Richards on a somewhat similar errand to that above

mentioned. He also has brought back a large amount of local information, numerous mineral specimens, and an explanatory map of the country he visited.

Mr. Justice Begbie, who had held a circuit in these same districts, and had seized the opportunity of making a reconnaissance of them, also reports the results of his observations as to the capabilities of the country for transit, the ground suitable for cultivation, &c.

In speaking of some mutual complaints between whites and Indians that were made to him at a village on the Upper Fraser, he goes on to say :—

"On the other hand, many cases of cattle stealing were alleged by the whites of all nations against the Indians, and stealing, indeed, of anything which could by possibility be eaten. For even the cattle which Indians stole they did not attempt to sell or make use of otherwise than as food, and it was admitted on all hands that many hundreds of Indians had died of absolute starvation during the winter. The Indians said that the salmon had failed them now for three years together. The whites alleged, what is obvious to everybody, that the Indians are extremely averse to work, except under the pressure of immediate hunger, and that they are so improvident as rarely to look beyond the wants of a day, and never to consider the wants of a winter beforehand. If I may venture an opinion, I should say this is much more true of the savages who have never been brought into contact with civilization than with those who have had even a little acquaintance with the whites. We found almost everywhere Indians willing to labour hard for wages, bargaining acutely for them, and perfectly acquainted with gold dust and the minute weights for measuring one and two dollars' worth. The circumstances are inconsistent with an utter heedlessness for next day's requirements, for in all cases we had to find these Indians in provisions as well as wages; and the amount for the most abject drudgery to which human labour can be put, viz. carrying burdens, being 8s. per day and provisions, pretty uniformly wherever we went, shows of itself a very high average rate of profit as the wages of labour in British Columbia. If this is the average remuneration of the most unskilled, what ought skilled labour, supported by capital, to earn? It was the uniform practice of storekeepers to entrust these Indians with their goods, generally 100 lbs. of flour, beans, or pork, and provisions for their own subsistence. Thefts were said to be unknown, and great care taken of their burthens; and these individuals who work I found extremely fleshy and hearty. My impression of the Indian population is, that they have far more natural intelligence, honesty, and good manners than the lowest class—say the agricultural and mining population—of any European country I ever visited, England included."

Mr. Justice Begbie's recapitulation of the chief points he observed were :—

"1st. The ready submission of a foreign population to the declaration of the will of the Executive, when expressed clearly and discreetly, however contrary to their wishes. 2nd. The great preponderance of the Californian or Californianized element of the population and the paucity of British subjects. 3rd. The great riches, both auriferous and agricultural, of the country. 4th. The great want of some fixity of tenure for agricultural purposes; and 5th. The absence of all means of communication, except by foaming torrents in canoes or over goat-tracks on foot, which renders all productions of the

country—except such as, like gold, can be carried with great ease in small weight and compass—practically valueless.”

The CHAIRMAN, in behalf of the Society, returned thanks to his Grace the Duke of Newcastle for his kindness in sending these communications, and also to Lieutenants Mayne and Palmer and Chief Justice Begbie, who had prepared them, and to whom geographers were highly indebted for papers descriptive of this slightly-known country. On looking over the accompanying pictorial sketches, it was evident that vessels of some size could ascend high up the rivers,—a fact which greatly increased the value of British Columbia. It was very gratifying to see young officers of the navy employed in examining and developing that great distant colony of the British empire, and he was especially pleased to find that one of those so distinguished was the son of his friend Sir Richard Mayne. The red line on the map indicated the separation between the mainland of the United States and that of the British territory; and in carrying the line eastwards down the river Columbia to the island of San Juan, it must be obvious to every one that it was of the highest importance to England that she should possess a free transit of her auriferous and other products from the Fraser River and its affluents, by the mouth of the Columbia, to the Pacific. In looking at the map suspended before them, the attention of the Society was also naturally called to those passes of the Rocky Mountains which Captain Palliser and his associates had traversed, and also to the point (Fort Colville) at which they had recently arrived; and it was to be hoped that, before this session closed, geographers would be in possession of much valuable information respecting the interior of this vast country, apparently so rich in gold. He regretted that the engineer officer, the chief of the survey along the British frontier, Colonel Hawkins, had been prevented from being present.

SIR EDWARD BELCHER, R.N., F.R.G.S., on being called upon, said that he regretted he could not afford any information about the district in question, and little even about the coasts of Vancouver Island, as he had not touched on the coast beyond Nootka Sound. When he was there, in 1838, he found the natives were cultivating potatoes, and he afterwards learned that they sold them at very low prices to the whalers: further, that they were imported by these vessels to the Sandwich Islands, where they were in great demand.

The point, however, which caused him much concern was the limiting boundary on the 49th parallel.

In the year 1838, by direct instructions from the Home Government, as well as confidential instructions from the naval Commander-in-Chief in the Pacific, it became his duty to report on the Oregon question, and at that period so little was our Government aware of the true state of affairs that in his instructions he was taught to expect that he would find the English located on the northern bank and Americans on the south, and he was cautioned particularly not to give any ground for offence on the part of the latter. This division at that period, it would be seen, pointed out the Oregon as our natural boundary, confining us more nearly to the 46th, instead of the 49th, parallel; but, to his surprise, he found the British colours flying on Fort George, on the southern side of the entrance, and not a single American located on the whole line of the Oregon up to the Hudson Bay settlement at Fort Vancouver! On his arrival there he learned that the temporary Governor had not only permitted but invited American missionaries to settle on the Wallamette (a southern tributary, but in the Hudson Bay territory), and, moreover, had provided them with seed, sheep,* and every facility for forming a settlement.

* At this period such supplies were so *niggardly* withheld from Her Majesty's ships, as to cause the other officers of the Hudson Bay Company, at Fort Vancouver, to openly reprobate the conduct of their chief!

At length, when a sufficient number had become located (a body, he believes, came across the Rocky Mountains), they petitioned the American Government to afford the necessary protection to American citizens, and thus it was that British rule was ousted from the Columbia or Oregon River.* Immediately subsequent to this he visited Monterey, California, where an insurrection had taken place, and they had declared themselves independent of Mexico. The American Consul there had married the daughter of the then President. He had informed him that "his instructions fully warranted him in stating that the American Government expected the Oregon question was in my hands, that it was to be settled that year, and that if the British Government was disposed to meet the question in a fair spirit, the American Government would not offer any objection to California being held by Great Britain for the Mexican debt" (at this period the revolutionary chiefs were disposed to ally themselves to England).

On his reaching San Blas the Vice-Consul informed him that he had been requested by the Minister at Mexico to apply to him for the fullest information on all these matters, and he was assured by him (Mr. Barron) that the tenor of his despatch to the Home Government—a copy of which was furnished to him—would prove most satisfactory (this was as from confidential communications with the Embassy). It was subsequently intimated to him, "That as he was a Commander in the Navy, and had travelled out of his province in communicating direct on such subjects, no notice would be taken of it." The result fully verified the remark. England lost California, the Oregon, and was, to use a nautical phrase, "fleeted up" to the 49th degree.

If the British Government had acted with becoming prudence in 1838, and had viewed well the ground before ceding the Hudson Bay territory, the San Juan difficulty never would have presented itself. We had literally been shouldered out of the Oregon territory by the over-zealous desire of this Sub-Governor of Fort Vancouver to introduce American missionaries into the rich lands of the Wallamette.

DR. HODGKIN, F.R.G.S., was struck with the statement of one of the writers that the Indian population were destitute of forethought, and made no provision for winter and coming wants. He thought that if the gentlemen employed by Government in these distant services had previously made themselves better acquainted with ethnology, their reports would have been somewhat modified. The early accounts of the natives of North-Western America showed that in the construction of their dwellings and in the curing of fish, &c., they were both disposed and able to provide for their wants. He was, therefore, forced to conclude that their present improvidence was the result of their deterioration by the more recent increased communication with whites (fur-traders and gold-seekers). The fact that some were now employed in work proved that they might be useful to themselves and others in this important but too long neglected portion of the British empire.

He was glad to be able to say that the present Secretary of State for the Colonies, and his predecessor Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton, had taken a warm interest in the aboriginal tribes in that quarter, and he felt assured that, if properly treated and instructed, the native population would prove of great advantage to the settlers who now, whilst seeking gold, can only obtain the means of subsistence at exorbitant prices.

Intimately connected with this territory was the proposed railway passing through British North America, and connecting the Atlantic with the Pacific Ocean; and if England did not throw away her money in rifle-clubs and the like expenses, she might easily find the means of making this line, which

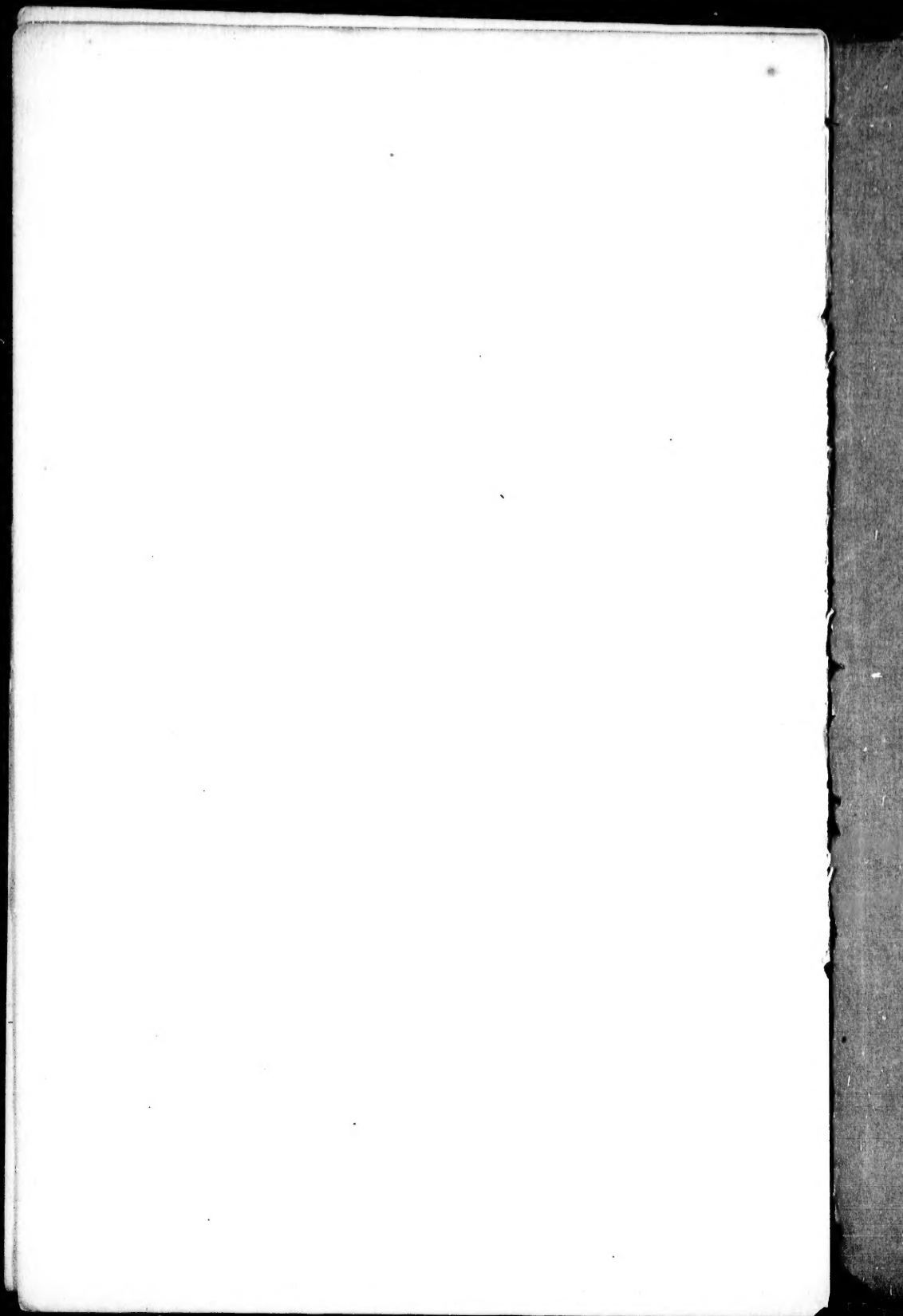
* *Vide* p. 297, *Voyage of Sulphur, 1837 to 1842*; and for a complete history of the Oregon, *vide* Washington Irving's 'Astoria.'

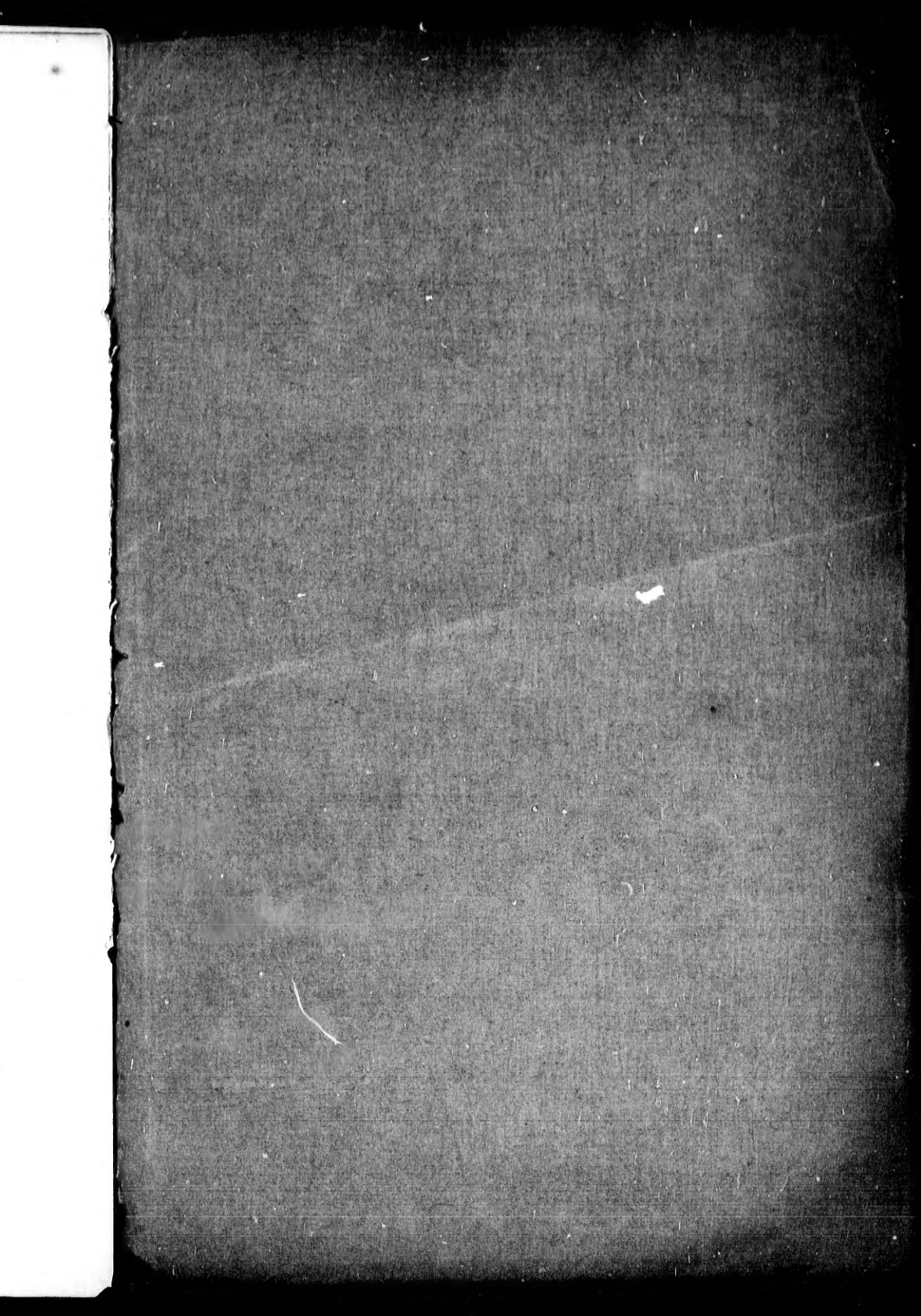
should be regarded as one of the most important in the globe. Our fellow-member, James Macqueen, so well known by his African labours, had been long devoted to this object.

He would mention as bearing on this subject that Captain W. Kennedy, the commander of one of the late Arctic expeditions, who was partly an Indian by birth, had since the last meeting left England for the express purpose of forming, in conjunction with one of the chiefs, of excellent probity and character, a civilized Indian settlement near the Lake of the Woods, and on the probable line of route. It well deserved all the support and encouragement which could be given to it.

MR. JOHN CRAWFURD, F.R.G.S., would not recommend anybody to go particularly to New Columbia for gold-digging. He should not like to take up a residence there himself in preference to many other places in America and Australia. With regard to the San Juan difficulty, it was monstrous to suppose that two countries, having millions of square miles of land at their disposal, and bound together by such ties as those of America and England, should go to war about that paltry little island. They were respectively bound, moreover, under a penalty of 20,000,000*l.* per annum to keep the peace: 20,000,000*l.* worth of American cotton, tobacco, and corn, came to England every year, and 20,000,000*l.* worth of English manufactures went to America. It was ridiculous, therefore, to suppose that war would result from the little unpleasantness that had arisen about a small island. He did not agree with Dr. Hodgkin about the volunteer question. He thought the movement an excellent one, and would observe that they did not owe it to the Government but to the press of the country, and especially to the *Times* newspaper: in fact, it might be said that the press had done it all. He believed the whole of the gold yearly produced by New Columbia was not more than half a million sterling—the twenty-fourth part of what Australia had been yielding for the last eight or ten years. It was not that gold did not abound in New Columbia, for there was not the least doubt but that it did, over very extensive fields rich in yield; there were however physical and he hoped only temporary obstacles to its cheap production. At the commencement of the Californian and Australian gold discoveries many people were in terror that we would be ruined by the influx of gold—injured by too much gold; but the fact was, that although gold and silver had been added to our previous supply to the yearly amount of some 50,000,000*l.*, it had produced no diminution whatever in the value of the precious metals, while commerce had been vastly promoted by it. In reality, the new supply was so much capital added to the previous capital of the world. And it was worthy of remark that silver had kept pace with gold, so that there was no relative disproportion in the value of the two metals, and this was principally owing to the discovery of quicksilver mines in California, upon the price of which the productiveness of the mines of silver always depended.

The CHAIRMAN said that many years ago he had ventured to express the opinion in various writings, and in a lecture delivered at the Royal Institution, that there need be no apprehension of having too much of a good thing, by the discoveries of enormous accumulations of gold; and the result up to the present time seemed to have proved the opinion to have been sound.





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